

Date: 7 December 2021

Item: Assisted Transport Services Update

This paper will be considered in public

1 Summary

- 1.1 This paper outlines the work carried out to progress the Assisted Transport Services (ATS) strategy since the last update to the Panel, on 24 February 2021.
- 1.2 It also provides an update on how ATS continues to adapt to support Londoners with reduced mobility during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, as well as information on Demand Responsive Bus Trials and the emerging work with London Councils around Taxicard, as raised when the last update was given.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Panel is asked to note the paper.**

3 Background

- 3.1 ATS refers to the range of services available to assist people with limited mobility who require additional help getting around. Services available in London include door-to-door transport services such as Dial-a-Ride (DaR) and Taxicard, alongside enablers to using general public transport, such as travel mentoring. ATS are pre-booked and so Turn up and Go, which does not require pre-booking, does not come under its umbrella.
- 3.2 The ATS roadmap sets out a series of incremental actions aimed at the following priority areas for improvement:
- (a) increasing customers' awareness of the range of ATS available;
 - (b) simplifying the customer service offering by helping customers to make the right choices about which service to use and ensuring consistency in the information we provide;
 - (c) harnessing the opportunities created by improvements to the accessibility of general public transport to increase customer independence where possible; and
 - (d) integration, where possible, of the operating resources available to ATS to make best use of available funding to cater for present and future demand.

- 3.3 The Mayor's Transport Strategy commits TfL to delivering improvements in these areas, based around five key design principles:
- (a) consistently **safe and reliable** journeys, with a customer focus, including highly trained staff across the whole network;
 - (b) providing **convenience** through information and support, to improve user confidence in journey planning and independent travelling;
 - (c) allowing users **flexibility and choice** in their preferred mode, time of travel, booking approach and level of assistance;
 - (d) providing a seamless and **integrated** multi-modal service, single user platform and personalised account, that incorporate all public transport modes including dedicated assisted transport services; and
 - (e) utilising the latest technological **innovation** in bookings, payments, service routing, customer care and performance monitoring, to ensure the system is convenient, efficient and provides value for money.
- 3.4 During the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, London's ATS services have adapted to support customers in line with the above principles, and in light of rapidly evolving circumstances. Alongside this work, the momentum for change and improvement within this area of TfL activity has also been maintained. Updates on both these strands of activity are provided below.

4 Supporting ATS customers through the coronavirus pandemic

Passenger support

- 4.1 Until recently, demand for DaR services has grown slowly but steadily since the last update, at which time DaR was receiving some 15 per cent of the journey requests seen pre-pandemic. Over the succeeding months, DaR continued to receive higher levels of trip requests, reaching 47 per cent of pre-Covid demand in mid-October 2021.
- 4.2 Since mid-October 2021, journey requests have stabilized, and demand has remained at approximately 47 per cent of pre-Covid volumes over the four weeks. We are still meeting over 95 per cent of all trip requests, against a target of 90 per cent.
- 4.3 This plateauing of journey requests appears to be primarily due to concerns about rising numbers of coronavirus cases amongst our passengers, although the not all social clubs and similar locations have re-opened.
- 4.4 The increasing demand for DaR services has meant that we have relaxed our one-household per bus rule, in line with Government guidelines around social distancing. We will now allow multiple passengers on a bus when required, in particular when our customers are all going to and from the same destination.
- 4.5 We are still requiring customers to wear face coverings whilst travelling, as do our drivers whilst assisting passengers.

- 4.6 We continue to limit capacity as much as possible, whilst still meeting demand, to reduce any possible risk to our customers and to ensure passengers are sitting at least one metre from the driver.
- 4.7 As with DaR, Taxicard had seen increasing demand over the months since our last update, though that has fallen back again. Taxicard returned to some 90 per cent of pre-Covid volumes, though it has been tracking at around 70 per cent over recent months.
- 4.8 Taxicard performance has generally been good, with over 95 per cent of trips being met within 15 minutes of the scheduled time over the three months ending in October 2021.
- 4.9 ComCab London, the service partner contracted to deliver Taxicard and previously known as City Fleet, currently has enough drivers to deliver all required journeys, and does not foresee issues in the short-term. However, ComCab is well aware of the high numbers of drivers leaving the trade, and is undertaking significant recruitment activities to insulate themselves against any future shortfall.
- 4.10 We expect demand for both services to grow should the continuing campaigns to encourage vaccination amongst all populations and booster shots for those eligible prove successful in limiting Covid cases.

Travel Mentoring Service

- 4.11 In February 2021, we reported on the new Covid-safe methods of working the Travel Mentoring team was using to assist passengers. With changes in Government guidance, we have been able to return to more face-to-face work.
- 4.12 Individual journey assistance and group activities, such as bus days, have been restarted. The latter is particularly important considering bus days had been suspended, as there was no effective way to undertake these activities safely. Both TfL colleagues and customers continue to wear face coverings, and follow appropriate hygiene protocols in line with the latest government guidance.
- 4.13 We are retaining some of the new methods of working implemented during the pandemic and are offering video or telephone assistance where customers prefer. Although most people prefer the in-person approach, it's important to offer digital alternatives when requested.
- 4.14 Train the trainer sessions have also restarted. These sessions are designed to assist staff at organisations such as clubs and residences to provide advice to their residents and customers on independent travel. Our Travel Mentoring team will meet with staff at these organisations and take them through all the travel options available to disabled people and those with other mobility impairments. We will also provide coaching on how to assist their customers with their travel needs in a positive, supportive way.

5 Taxicard future demand

- 5.1 When we last updated the Panel we were asked about how we will map future demand and encourage eligible Londoners to apply for Taxicard membership. We are currently working collaboratively with London Councils to ensure

Taxicard remains an important part of the ATS mix.

- 5.2 Although we provide the majority of funding for Taxicard (and have provided 100 per cent of funding in the last two full financial years), the programme is managed by London Councils on behalf of the London boroughs, and it is the latter who primarily promotes the service.
- 5.3 TfL assists in publicizing Taxicard in our customer facing materials, such as the [Accessible Transport in London brochures](#) included in all new member welcome packs.
- 5.4 TfL also features Taxicard on our website in our [accessible transport pages](#), and provides links to the [Taxicard information](#) and application website.
- 5.5 TfL's Travel Mentoring team is also fully versed in Taxicard, and provide advice on Taxicard services and membership process as part of their role.
- 5.6 TfL, London Councils, and several boroughs have been holding joint meetings to discuss how to best take the service forward. Although these working parties are in their early days, we have already had productive discussions around such areas as harmonising membership criteria and benefits.

6 Demand Responsive Bus Trials

- 6.1 At the February 2021 meeting, we were also asked to provide an update on Demand Responsive Bus (DRB) Trials.
- 6.2 The DRB trials in Sutton and Ealing in 2019-2020 tested technology to enable customers to book on a mobile app, and also provided a phone booking option. Originally planned to run for 12-months, the schemes had to be cut short as a result of the pandemic. The GoSutton trial started in May 2019 and ended in March 2020, whilst Slide Ealing launched in November 2019 and also ended in March 2020.
- 6.3 Although this meant some of the planned changes, surveys and testing could not happen, these trials still provide useful insights into how DRB can serve traditional DaR passengers:
 - (a) Older people are happy to use DRB services. Riders of the trial services were more likely to be aged 65 or over than the proportion in the general population – Freedom Pass riders represented nearly of 50 per cent of rides on GoSutton, and a third on Slide Ealing.
 - (b) Wheelchair users were attracted to the service, with 13 per cent of GoSutton customers using wheelchairs. These customers also had a higher than average number of rides.
 - (c) Older passengers are happy to use an app for booking. Eighty-three per cent of Slide Ealing Freedom Pass bookings were by app, and 98 per cent of GoSutton Freedom Pass bookings were by app. Users were satisfied with the digital experience and thought the apps were easy to use.
 - (d) DRB is not a door to door service, utilising “virtual stops” which customers must walk to in order to board the bus. Some users expressed frustration if

pick-up/ drop-off virtual stops differed each time for the same journeys.

- (e) A customer satisfaction survey was undertaken for the GoSutton Service. Those respondents with an older person's Freedom Pass gave particularly high ratings (9.6 or 9.7 out of 10) for the cleanliness and condition of the vehicle, personal security, safety of driving and helpfulness of the driver.
- (f) The lowest ratings (all 8.7) for those with an older person's Freedom Pass was for the convenience of pick-up/drop off, area covered and the time waited for pick up – though these were in line with respondents with a disabled person's Freedom Pass or paying a fare.

- 6.4 There are indications that DaR and Taxicard customers would use a DRB service. In the GoSutton Customer Satisfaction Survey, respondents were asked to consider whether they would use certain modes more, less or the same in the future if GoSutton was available.
- 6.5 Of the 541 respondents, 39 were DaR users and 23 (59 per cent) of these stated that they would use DaR less if DRB was available. A similar proportion (56 per cent) of Taxicard users in the survey also stated they would use Taxicard less if DRB was available. These are small sample sizes, not statistically significant, but point toward the possibility that DRB can have a role in ATS.
- 6.6 Through engagement with the DRB service providers, DaR has also gained useful insights into booking and scheduling systems and customer facing web portals and apps. This knowledge has helped inform our specifications for TfL's new system procurement.

7 ATS Roadmap updates

- 7.1 Progress along the ATS Roadmap continues to be made and a summary of progress since the update in February 2021 is included at Appendix 1. Further information relating to the key areas of progress are provided below.

One-stop shop booking and scheduling platform

- 7.2 Central to the delivery of the ATS strategy is the introduction of a one-stop shop that will eventually give customers the ability to access the range of ATS services using a single online portal alongside a telephone option. This project was paused during the height of the pandemic, and the invitation to tender was released in October 2020.
- 7.3 Thirteen companies originally submitted bids, and we are now down to the final three contenders. TfL is currently undertaking a negotiation phase with the finalists to ensure best value for money is achieved.

ATS customer segmentation and future demand

- 7.4 TfL has received the customer segmentation report discussed in February's update, and is analysing the results in the context of developing the future ATS strategy. We will present the outcomes of this research in the next ATS update

8 Next Steps

- 8.1 Updates on progress will continue to be provided to the Panel every six months and will continue to be shared with the London Assembly Transport Committee as has been the practice to date.

List of appendices to this report:

Appendix 1: The journey towards the vision for a world class Assisted Transport Services – December 2021

List of Background Papers:

Papers submitted to the panel on 24 February 2021, relating to Assisted Transport Services Update

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